



The Publisher: Henry Luce and His American Century

By Alan Brinkley

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Acclaimed historian Alan Brinkley gives us a sharply realized portrait of Henry Luce, arguably the most important publisher of the twentieth century.

As the founder of *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Life* magazines, Luce changed the way we consume news and the way we understand our world. Born the son of missionaries, Henry Luce spent his childhood in rural China, yet he glimpsed a milieu of power altogether different at Hotchkiss and later at Yale. While working at a Baltimore newspaper, he and Brit Hadden conceived the idea of *Time*: a “news-magazine” that would condense the week’s events in a format accessible to increasingly busy members of the middle class. They launched it in 1923, and young Luce quickly became a publishing titan. In 1936, after *Time*’s unexpected success—and Hadden’s early death—Luce published the first issue of *Life*, to which millions soon subscribed.

Brinkley shows how Luce reinvented the magazine industry in just a decade. The appeal of *Life* seemingly cut across the lines of race, class, and gender. Luce himself wielded influence hitherto unknown among journalists. By the early 1940s, he had come to see his magazines as vehicles to advocate for America’s involvement in the escalating international crisis, in the process popularizing the phrase “World War II.” In spite of Luce’s great success, happiness eluded him. His second marriage—to the glamorous playwright, politician, and diplomat Clare Boothe—was a shambles. Luce spent his later years in isolation, consumed at times with conspiracy theories and peculiar vendettas.

The Publisher tells a great American story of spectacular achievement—yet it never loses sight of the public and private costs at which that achievement came.

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Editorial Review

From Publishers Weekly

Starred Review. The magazines Henry Luce and Time Inc. launched have become institutions, but as Brinkley's magisterial biography reminds us, Luce was only 24 years old when he published the first issue of *Time* at the tail end of a recession in 1923—not much different from today's digital media entrepreneurs. (Brinkley also details the role of Brit Hadden, Luce's friendly rival at Hotchkiss and Yale and eventual business partner, in making the magazine a success.) Those around Luce frequently described him as arrogant, and his intense sense of purpose increasingly played out in the pages of his magazines, like his insistence (despite numerous warnings from observers on the front lines) on supporting Chiang Kai-shek as a counter to the rise of communism in China. Brinkley appears to have read every issue from the early decades of *Time*, *Fortune*, and *Life* cover to cover, grounding his criticisms of Luce's social and political vision in rigorous detail. He's equally solid on Luce's personal life, including his early years as the son of Christian missionaries in China and his whirlwind courtship of (and rocky marriage to) Clare Boothe Luce. A top-notch biography, and a valuable addition to the history of American media. (Apr. 22)

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From [Bookmarks Magazine](#)

Invariably drawing comparisons with the political slant of his subject's magazines, reviewers praised Alan Brinkley's evenhandedness in *The Publisher*. They portrayed the book as an antidote not only to earlier, more negative biographies but to a generation that cannot comprehend the influence once held by *Time* brethren, especially in this age of digital information. Above all, critics praised Brinkley's feel for the particular prose style of Luce and his magazines, which gave birth to many an expression now considered cliché. A few reviewers commented that while the book is extraordinarily well researched, Brinkley still holds his subject at arm's length. Then again, for a man of such public titanic proportions, he remained a lonely, private man.

From [Booklist](#)

Forty-three years after Henry Luce's death, historian Brinkley brings fresh perspective to Luce's life and work. Brinkley analyzes Luce's political influence while furnishing readers with fair-minded estimates of his character. Typical of media moguls, Luce sought political influence through his instruments—Time, Fortune, and Life magazines. But if Luce's frustration with the limitations of his sway over politicians flows through Brinkley's pages, so too does Luce's acumen in launching his publications, or co-acumen to speak accurately about Time, which was as much the brainchild of Luce's prep-school comrade Briton Hadden (who died in 1929). Brinkley's portrayal of Hadden's competitive, sometimes combative relationship with Luce foreshadows one of his lifelong features: his inability to establish friendships. He had business associates, not chums, and his two marriages (the second to celebrity politician Clare Boothe) and several affairs were stormy, as indicated by Brinkley's extensive quotations from the archives. Luce might not have been very happy, but he was wealthy, famous, and a redoubtable journalistic force, all of which are reasons for settling into this absorbing biography. --Gilbert Taylor

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Katie Martinez:

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